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Educational Article

Family violence among female medical students: Its prevalence and impact on their mental health status – A cross-sectional study



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المخلص

أهداف البحث: إن العنف ضد المرأة يعتبر من المشاكل الصحية الرئيسية عالمياً. وتُظهر الدراسات أن العنف يؤثر على الحالة العقلية للضحايا. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف مدى انتشار العنف الأسري بين طالبات الطب السعوديات، ودراسة علاقته مع صحة الطالبات العقلية، وتحديد تأثيره على التحصيل الأكاديمي لهن.

طرق البحث: أجريت هذه الدراسة المقطعية على طالبات الطب، في جامعة الملك سعود، من السنة الأولى إلى السنة الخامسة. واستخدمت الاستبانة الخاصة بدراسة العنف والاستبانة الخاصة بدراسة الصحة العقلية جمعت بيانات الاستبانة وحللت باستخدام برمجيات الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية التي شملت التحليل وحيد المتغير البسيط، وتحليلات المتغيرين ونمذجة الانحدار الخطي.

النتائج: شارك في الدراسة 363 (79%) من أصل 460 من طالبات الطب السعوديات. وظهر أن 19 (5.3%) من الطالبات يعانين من العنف الأسري. وحصل ضحايا العنف على 52% (منخفض) من نقاط قائمة الصحة العقلية. وقد لوحظ وجود علاقة سلبية بين العنف الأسري والصحة العقلية. كما لوحظ أيضاً وجود ارتباط بين الصحة العقلية والإنجاز الأكاديمي.

الاستنتاجات: إن نسبة انتشار العنف الأسري في هذه الدراسة أقل من النسب المنشورة في الدراسات الأخرى. ولم نستطع إيجاد علاقة مباشرة بين العنف الأسري والإنجاز الأكاديمي ولكن تأثر الإنجاز الأكاديمي (المعدل التراكمي)

للطالبات بطريقة غير مباشرة بوجود العنف الأسري من خلال التغييرات في الصحة العقلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: طالبات الطب; العنف الأسري; الصحة العقلية; الأداء الأكاديمي

Abstract

Objectives: Violence against women is recognized worldwide as a major public health problem. Studies show that violence affects the mental well-being of the victims. The study explores the prevalence of family violence among Saudi female medical students and its relationship with students' mental well-being and seeks to identify the effect of violence on students' academic achievements.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional study on 1st- to 5th-year Saudi female medical students, utilizing a validated violence screening questionnaire that asked the respondents about how often they were physically Hurt, Insulted, Threatened with harm, and Screamed at (HITS). Furthermore, the study administered a validated mental well-being questionnaire, the Mental Health Inventory 5 (MHI-5), for the assessment of the mental status of the respondents. The analyses included simple univariate analyses, bivariate analyses and linear regression modelling.

Results: Of the total of 460 Saudi female medical students, 363 (79%) students participated in this study. Nineteen (5.3%) students confirmed being the victims of family violence. The victims had a mean MHI-5 score of 52%. A negative correlation was observed between violence and mental well-being scores. Significant

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association between the MHI-5 score and academic achievement was observed.

Conclusion: The prevalence of family violence in this study is less than the reported figures in other studies. We could not demonstrate a direct relationship between family violence and academic achievement. Students' academic achievement was indirectly associated with the presence of family violence through changes in mental well-being.

Keywords: Academic performance; Family violence; Female medical students; Mental health

Abbreviations: CTS, Conflict Tactics Scale; GPA, grade point average; HITS, Hurt, Insulted, Threatened with harm, and Screamed at; IPV, intimate partner violence; MHI-5, Mental Health Inventory 5 Items; KSU, King Saud University

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Introduction

Family violence against women and girls refers to violence that occurs within the family and is inflicted by a family member who is trusted by the victim.^{1–3} Alpert cited that 67% of rapes and 49% of assaults were committed by individuals known to victims. The risk factors for family violence differ among cultures and include growing up in a violent home, being unmarried, age in their early twenties, and having a lower level of education.³

Most family violence studies have focused on violence between a woman and her intimate partner (IPV), with a lifetime prevalence range between 1.9% and 70%.⁴ Students are similar to others in the community and might be victimized by different types of family violence. AlQuaiz and Raheel reported that 10% of a sample of 419 female Saudi students (11–21 years old) had experienced sexual violence.⁵ Physical violence is accepted by Saudi society as a form of discipline for children and women.⁶ Research on family violence among university students has revealed that this form of violence exists in both Eastern and Western countries to a similar degree.^{7,8} Up to 52% of Turkish medical students had experienced family violence, and 17.8% of the sample had perpetrated violence against others.^{9,10} Among Lebanese medical students, 22% reported having a history of exposure to physical violence, while 98.8% of the sample reported being exposed to the verbal type of violence.¹¹ Cullinane, Alpert and Freund reported a high rate of family violence. They studied 370 medical students and found that 38% of them had a history of being abused.¹² Victims of family violence suffer physical and mental health problems and utilize health care services more frequently than those who are not victimized.^{13,14} Victims of physical and sexual abuse “in the context of their childhood environment” are at risk of lower academic achievement.¹⁵ Although screening for family violence has not been

supported by some studies,^{16–18} identifying victims of family violence helps minimize the effects of violence.¹⁹

It is important to screen medical students for being affected by family violence because its consequences may be negatively reflected in their future career. In Saudi Arabia, medical students have not been studied for the presence of family violence, and in this study, we aimed to (i) screen Saudi female medical students for the presence of family violence to determine its prevalence, (ii) examine its relationship with the mental well-being of the students, and (iii) examine the effect on their academic achievement. We hypothesized that the presence of family violence among female medical students would affect their mental well-being and negatively reflect on their academic performance.

Materials and Methods

This was a cross-sectional study conducted from March to April 2011 at the College of Medicine of King Saud University (KSU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Male and female medical students studied in separate buildings as required by legislation. Hence, involving the male students in this study was not feasible. Ethical approval was obtained from the Medical College Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited via an announcement for a lecture for female medical students aimed at increasing their awareness and understanding of family violence. The lecture defined and explained the types of violence. A previous study found that after an introductory lecture, student awareness of being a current or former victim of violence was increased.²⁰ All of the students who attended the lecture were invited to sign consent and complete a non-anonymous questionnaire about family violence. Refreshments were provided to all of the students, and there was no obligation to participate.

Study questions and aim

The research questions were as follows: how common is family violence among female KSU medical students? What is the effect of family violence on students' mental well-being? How is this reflected on their academic achievement? We aimed to explore the prevalence of family violence and its relationship with mental well-being among female Saudi medical students and to identify the effects of family violence and mental well-being on students' academic achievement. We hypothesized that the presence of family violence among female medical students would negatively affect their mental well-being and academic achievement (reflected by a lower grade point average; GPA).

Study subjects

This study included all of the first- to fifth-year Saudi female medical students who attended the introductory lecture and consented to complete the questionnaire.

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